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# LIVING AGE

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## SOME LINCOLN PROBLEMS

BY LORD CHARNWOOD

THE proposition that a man is a great administrator no more admits of demonstration than the proposition that a thing is beautiful; but in either case one may sometimes see that the critic, whose judgment should be far better than one's own, has not really looked, and, without setting up oneself as a critic, may beg him to do so. This is what I would wish to do to militarist historians who have treated of Lincoln, in so far as they have been governed by the assumptions on which their earliest predecessors criticized him.

In every war or state of disturbance the civil public is apt to do great injustice to the commander on the spot; demanding of him more rapid movement when, given the actual conditions of transport, his movement was really very rapid, or decisions which in fact might have been right but which the only information he could possibly have possessed would not have justified, or judicious and circumspect dealings of which, under the need of instant action, the human organism is not capable. Cruel wrong is thus done in many cases from that of the cautious Admiral Byng to that of the impetuous General Dyer. The corresponding injustice that soldiers are apt to do to the civil minister is neither so cruel in motive nor so harsh in effect, but it arises from an equal disregard of the actual circumstances under which the man had to act.

Lincoln has to some extent been criticized as if he had had the advice of a competent General Staff, as if he had

had a considerable choice of capable trained officers to use, and means of knowing their capacity, and as if it would have helped him to win the war if he had ignored all political considerations. His critics acknowledge, in a way, that he stood in no such fortunate position, and accordingly visit him only with very gentle blame. Nevertheless, few of them had the courage to brush aside altogether the complaints made of him by the particular soldiers whom at the time he inevitably displeased, and to say that in a position of extraordinary difficulty he displayed astonishing strength and wisdom in these matters.

My own impression grows stronger and stronger that Lincoln's military administration was on the whole a very great achievement, but I would rather hope that the subject will be handled later by a more competent critic. I content myself with having put one or two test questions which I could easily multiply, and with the dogmatically brief assertion that the principal criticisms which I have seen passed upon him, in this regard, have without exception been written in ignorance of important facts.

The strength, of which at least many signs will become apparent upon any candid examination of this part of his conduct, is not that of a man with some kind of special faculty for administrative office, or with quick intuition into novel circumstances and into men whom he had not studied; it is the slightly eccentric but none the less

effective strength of a man in whom ordinary candor, patience, and desire to do the right thing, however it might appear to others, habitually rose to that level just above our ordinary reach which amounts to heroism and to genius. We have now to ask how these same qualities showed themselves in the still more important field of general policy, and we shall find here, too, that the force of his statesmanship lay in something which eluded hasty observation. A superficial account of his dealings with McClellan suggests at first vacillation and inconsistency, where on closer inquiry we shall, at the lowest, find him a man who on the whole took the wisest course at each new turn in puzzling circumstances, and held his hand, when he could not wisely act, not from timidity but from self-command.

In the field more peculiarly his own, in which he had to deal with the greater puzzle presented by the blended issues of the Union and of freedom, first appearances are still more deceptive. It is pretty evident that he proved a very serviceable president; he kept the North together; but his services have been attributed to opportunism of a very common kind and the cheap and negative virtue of the sort of man who can never plunge. The qualities which must really be claimed for his statesmanship differ so immensely and yet so subtly from these that it may be well to call to mind at the outset that we are dealing with a man who in any case had something very profound and original about him. Of the author of the speeches and sayings which make Lincoln familiar to most of us it is only common sense to expect something very far removed from common politics in the main motive of his policy.

The great question about Lincoln's political career concerns of course his

relation to the confused blending of issues presented by the Union and emancipation. Given the facts that slavery was an absolutely poisonous institution, but that it was sanctioned in many of the states by the Constitution which alone held a great and beloved country together, it is easy to see in a general way what a difficult problem confronted any American statesman of the time, how nearly inevitable some inconsistency became to him if he was neither indifferent nor blindly zealous, and what a great temptation there was to the merest opportunism. I shall not attempt to summarize here the account which I have elsewhere tried to give of Lincoln's course throughout this controversy. I may be allowed to confess that the impression which I tried to convey has become to myself more and more convincing; it is that of a high consistency — fully thought-out principles bravely and undeviatingly followed — the nobility of which is redeemed from cold-blooded and austere dispassionateness by many intensely 'human' touches. What follows may or may not illustrate this to the reader.

Perplexities beset Lincoln from the very day in 1854 when, roused from the indifference as to politics into which he had fallen, he came out against the extension of slavery in a notable answer to Douglas. The advocates of immediate Abolition were after him immediately to nail him to their platform by making him speak at a meeting of theirs that night. Counseled by his partner Herndon, himself an Abolitionist, he took a 'buggy,' drove off into the country with his little son, and disappeared till all fear of meetings was over. Metaphorically speaking, he had to stay in that buggy eight years; that is, till the time came for him to issue the Proclamation of Emancipation. The reader may per-



haps recall that, as that time approached, the doubt as to whether existing circumstances justified the Proclamation constitutionally as an act of martial law, whether it would split the North in two, or re-invigorate it, whether it would prove a dead letter or, on the contrary, bring an immediate accession of black man-power to the North, etc., became exceedingly harassing. Up to a certain point it was all a question of carefully weighing probabilities, which Lincoln with his touch on the Border Slave States and on the ardent Emancipators could weigh far better than any other man. His general intention became fixed to issue the Proclamation whenever there was a sufficient success of the Northern arms to give it a send-off. But, unless a very signal victory came, the question what amount of success would suffice must be a matter of the most anxious guess-work.

It is evident that for some cause (to which I shall recur) Lincoln's personal desire to strike a direct blow at slavery grew more intense, but the risks which he must not lightly run were very real. His actual decision formed before the battle of the Antietam was to take any victory, however inconsiderable, that might then be won as the appointed moment for Emancipation. As is well known, this decision clothed itself in a strange form. Lincoln, the intense reasoner and often the ready acceptor of advice, had by this time acquired a strong sense, which he somewhere expresses, that convictions formed themselves inarticulately in the back of his mind which he did well to obey, and that he was always wrong when he let himself be persuaded out of them. In this case it is certain that the formation of his conviction was accompanied by fervent prayer, and the deeply religious temper in which his decision was made took for once, in this man

who was superstitious like all frontiersmen but usually only in a light sense, a decidedly superstitious form. As he frankly told his Cabinet, after due reading to them from Artemus Ward, he had made a vow to God — a regular covenant, Emancipation in return for a victory — and 'God had decided this question in favor of the Slaves.'

Meanwhile, both before and after his actual decision, he had again and again been forced to answer publicly people who pressed him for or against emancipation as the case might be. He had, of course, to express only the attitude which statesmen find it hardest to express happily, that of simple waiting and doubt. Some of his answers were really fine, others less so, but it is remarkable that he should have escaped giving any actually humbugging answers. I cannot forbear saying that his phrases afford no parallels to 'too proud to fight' or 'neutral even in thought.' Some of these answers of his are famous, but I do not know whether the following legend has been published, and, though not exactly conclusive on my present subject, it may provide occasion for a pause.

It is said that a friendly deputation from the Border State of Kentucky waited upon Lincoln to say that they had heard with alarm the rumor that he contemplated some overt attack upon slavery, and to warn him, from their local knowledge, of the disastrous effect which such rash conduct would have upon the loyalty of their state. He listened well, thanked them much for their advice, and promised to ponder it and do nothing precipitately. Then, with a puzzled and melancholy air, he told them how there were other people who gave him advice in a contrary sense. Only the other day, three very distinguished senators, whom he named, had been insisting that he must instantly do something in the direction

of Emancipation. Then he suddenly remembered that on that very afternoon, at a certain hour, the said three senators were coming to interview him on this matter. It reminded him of something that happened in one of the little backwoods schools that he had attended as a boy, and there followed the sort of long-drawn, loving description of some familiar scene of his youth which is characteristic of the story-telling American when he is at ease with his audience, and feels that they will be so with him.

They used to begin the day in that school by standing up in a row and reading a chapter of the Bible, verse and verse about. There was a little boy standing next Lincoln who could not read well. They read Daniel iii, and by ill luck that little boy got the first of the verses in which the names 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego' occur. His perturbation was extreme, but, pulling himself together with a convulsive effort, he cleared that verse somehow, and all seemed to be well. Looking at him, however, after a moment, Lincoln saw that he was in tears, and whispered 'What are you crying for?' 'Nothing,' said the little boy, 'only I can see those three miserable cusses coming round to me again.'

Lincoln was watching and waiting in sorely tried suspense before he issued the famous Proclamation of Emancipation. Probably his current reputation as a statesman rests on the fact that eventually he issued it at just the right moment. Much of the credit for this fact is indeed due to Seward, whose advice delayed him a little longer when he had once made up his mind to the policy. But it was inevitable that Lincoln, who did do the thing at the right moment, should thenceforth be thought of as the great emancipator. Now here arises the real question as to his rank among states-

men. Having always heard of him as the author of the signal act of emancipation, we are disappointed when we take up any history of the time and discover at once that he was not the originator of the policy which took shape in his great Proclamation, that on the contrary hundreds of people had been vainly pressing such a policy upon him for many months before he yielded, and that the emancipation which some of his generals had been trying to carry out locally had been sternly repressed by him.

We can easily convince ourselves that he showed prudence in this; the ultimate result was no doubt fortunate; and the story of his private hesitation and final decision happens to have a peculiar interest and charm. But there is nothing very magnificent in it all. He ought never, it may be said, to have got all this celebrity for freeing the slaves, when he should rather be described as the man who was so slow to free them. And the answer to this is by no means obvious. Mr. Lyman Trumbull has left on record a judgment upon him which seems hard to reject. Trumbull, it may be remembered, was elected senator for Illinois when Lincoln first aspired to that post. He had been a bold and self-sacrificing champion of the slave all his life; he was one of the valiant handful of republican senators who voted against their party when Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, was impeached, and by doing so saved America from a lasting disgrace; long afterward, at the age of eighty, he was one of the few men of standing to say a word, and a very brave word it was, for the exceedingly unpopular beginnings of a labor movement in American politics. Thus we have to read his privately expressed opinion of Lincoln with respect; and after bearing, as he does, glowing testimony from his own knowledge to Lin-

coln's honesty and to his kindness, his verdict upon his statesmanship is this: 'Mr. Lincoln was a follower and not a leader in public affairs. Without attempting to form or create public sentiment, he waited till he saw whither it tended, and then was astute to take advantage of it.' And he quotes another old associate's judgment on Lincoln: 'He was a trimmer, and such a trimmer as the world has never seen.'

It is well to face the fact that fair and competent men did form this opinion of Lincoln, that many people are inclined to it still, and that there is *prima facie* evidence for it, to which one may at first be puzzled to find an answer. There is indeed no alternative to this relatively disparaging view of him (as at the highest a second-class statesman, a shrewd and a conscientious opportunist and nothing more) except the extreme opposite view which ascribes to him an originality, an undeviating consistency, and a philosophic grasp of facts in relation to a deeply thought-out principle, such as few others, if any, of the world's great statesmen have shown.

This latter is my own view. I shall not here deal at any length with the facts which I think make this conclusion irresistible, for I have given a consecutive account of them elsewhere; but if it is permissible for me to refer once more to my own *Life of Lincoln* I do so for the sake of confessing that I think I hardly emphasized enough his claims to what may be called a philosophic statesman. 'Trimmer' he may have been in the sense in which Halifax proudly called himself such, that of a man who, when most people round him incline dangerously far in one direction, will himself incline in the other. But the notion that he had no deep convictions of his own, and waited with his ear to the ground till he could detect which way popular feeling in-

clined and then went that way, breaks down entirely when the facts are more closely considered. In the first place this idea of him proceeds from the men who wanted violent measures of emancipation before he did, and, though it sounds a little shocking, it must now be clearly said that he was right and they were wrong; they boldly took the second best course, he refrained from it till he was certain that the best was not possible. In the second place, not only this but every important action of his career after he returned to public life in 1854, every important refusal or delay of action, every attempt in which he failed because he stood alone and died too soon, was quite certainly consistent with principles which he had formed and enunciated with astonishing completeness at a very early stage of the conflict. The evidence for both these statements must now be indicated.

First, then, no one will now contend that the actual process by which America has applied the principles of freedom and equality to the negroes has been at all a beautiful business. Of course it was a good thing to make sure that slavery should cease; it was much better to do it in a bad way than not to do it at all; and when Lincoln did make up his mind to it there was no longer any tolerable alternative open. Nevertheless, to make the negroes free in law and do nothing more for them was a very poor solution of the social problem which they presented, and the social and economic disorganization which Northern intervention produced in the South for many years after the war forms a painful chapter in history. It would certainly have been far better for the black man and the white equally, if emancipation could have been brought about by a more gradual process, with compensation for the dispossessed master and educational pro-



visions for the liberated slave, and if the slave states themselves could have been induced to take the part which their own interests demanded of them in working out the policy.

But all this is just what was likely to ensue if the Border slave states adhering to the North and if Congress, which would have had to provide the funds, would have listened to Lincoln's advice and entreaties in the course of 1862. While he was resisting, in a fashion which seemed so cold-blooded, impulsive officers and legislators who would have freed unlawfully a few runaways here and there, he was in fact making his last stand for a slower and less sensational policy of liberation, which, it is evident to-day, must have worked far more beneficently for all. Only he stood alone.

And, if he stood alone in his attitude as a patient reformer, who may easily be set down as cold-blooded while he 'bites his lips and keeps quiet,' as he once said, it must be recalled that he stood all but equally alone among the Northern leaders in his comprehension and sympathy for actual individual negroes of flesh and blood; to the sentimental and in practice unkind theory that the two races were in all points equal he paid no deference; but a gifted African could discuss very burning questions with him, and for the first time in a white man's presence 'forget that there was any difference in the color of our skins.'

But, secondly, in this and every other connected matter, it is idle to ascribe any part of Lincoln's conduct to indifferent opportunism if the whole course of his policy to the end was foreshadowed in trenchant declarations of thought-out principle which he uttered from the first. That it was so cannot of course be demonstrated completely without a lengthy and complicated analysis of the situation as it developed

and shifted, and an assemblage of select passages from his speeches with which neither the reader nor the writer is to be burdened here, but one may very briefly point out the test which a studious critic would in this case find it easy to apply.

Let us call to mind the professions of liberal doctrine and of aspiration toward human equality with which the American Commonwealth began; the really considerable degree in which such aspirations had been realized for a very large number of people of European origin in America; and the fact, very important in this connection, that in Lincoln's day no other large and prosperous country in the world practised popular government in a comparable degree. Let us call to mind further the way in which slavery, not always presenting itself in a very ugly form, was bound up with the whole way of life of a large part of this community; the constitutional obligation under which the rest of the community lay of tolerating it for the present; and all the while the difficulty of tolerating it at all without acquiescing in action which would have extended it and in doctrine which would have justified it. Lastly, let us remember that after all, as Lincoln said, 'if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.'

In view of all this, it is hard to imagine a more bewildering conflict of moral emotions than that which arose for patriotic and just-minded Americans when the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise at last made slavery a question upon which practical politicians had definitely to choose their course, and to choose it with the risk in their minds of breaking up their country altogether. Calmly moralizing on the situation afterward, we see that it raised such questions of principle as the following: For how much should a man's country, and the greatness of his coun-

try, count to him? On what does the worth of patriotic loyalty depend? What true principles were embodied in the sounding phrases of the American fathers about freedom and equality? What sincerity or good sense was there in the self-contented claim of Americans to have been governed by them? How could such sentiments apply at all to the inferior races of mankind? What part does mere freedom play in the welfare of man? What are the difficulties and the value of popular government, and how far can it be trusted in great emergencies? Is there a sense in which practical statesmen must compromise moral principles? Where is the line to be drawn between needful acquiescence in imperfection and base compliance with wrong? When should the reformer be patient and when should he be zealous? And, in general, is it possible to maintain a faith in right and even in progress when dealing practically with the affairs of this troublesome world?

All these questions do present themselves in this connection, at least, after the event. We should hardly demand of any man that before the event he should have thought out a solution of most if not all of them, sufficient for his own practical guidance, and capable of being cast into words which could enlighten other men as well. Still less should we demand of a man, if in comparative leisure he had brooded long and profitably on such matters, that thereafter in the thick of political strife and at one crisis after another of great affairs committed to him, he should invariably act upon the conclusions to which this pondering had led him — like Wordsworth's 'Happy Warrior,' who

Through the heat of conflict keeps the law  
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw.

Yet this is exactly what Lincoln did.

Any student of politics who now looks carefully through Lincoln's speeches, mostly delivered in heated controversy on the stump, from 1854 till his presidency, interpreting them here and there by his few recorded confidential utterances and by those phrases of his later speeches which most evidently bear the stamp of long-settled conviction, can with fair ease construct out of them a practical philosophy of the problem then before Americans, which can be expressed substantially in Lincoln's actual words, and which Lincoln had evidently formed for himself when first he came forward as a leader at all. One may or may not agree with it in every point, but of its profoundly original quality, of its moral dignity, of its intellectual grasp, and of its fulness of suggestion in regard to political and moral problems of all time, there can be no doubt. The wonderful thing, however, is that, having once in this way discovered the general line of Lincoln's political ideas when he started on his great venture, the historian is bound to see, in the whole of his subsequent political decisions on circumstances as they arose, an obedience to these ideas which is all but undeviating, and, where the circumstances were clear, instantaneous.

As I have said, I make no endeavor to demonstrate this here, but I have no hesitation in throwing this out as a challenge to anyone who may more carefully examine the material of Lincoln's biography. The course of this alleged opportunist, astutely detecting and turning to advantage, as his critics suggest, the tendencies of a public sentiment which he did nothing to create, was, we may observe in passing, one which brought him during his presidency into incessant conflict with the most vocal public opinion. It was, moreover, in exact conformity with principles which can be plainly traced



in all his public utterances from the first. There have, indeed, been few statesmen for whom so high a claim in this respect can be made. If, for instance, we consider our own Chatham, we may find the like generous width of mind and the like power of insight in different directions at once, but we shall no more find the same consistency and patient fulness of thought than we shall find the same patient persistency of effort. Or, if we look at the yet more tragic biography of the second Pitt, between the days when as a lover of progress and of peace he was friendly to the French Revolution, and the days when his main energy was bound to be devoted to war abroad and repression at home, we may impute no fundamental disloyalty, but we can trace no vital congruity. But Lincoln's public conduct throughout is of one piece with itself and with all that he knew of his private thoughts and desires.

I propose in some future article to say a little of the medium of tradition through which our conception of him largely comes to us, and in conclusion to offer some notes as to his reported thoughts and feelings on great subjects which lie outside the political field.

Perhaps the earliest considered appreciation of Lincoln which appeared in England was the prize Latin oration of the University of Cambridge in 1866. The young prize winner, now Sir John Sandys, whose destiny since has led him as the University Public Orator to condense into the thought-compelling medium of Latin prose the salient qualities of many eminent persons, picked out on this occasion two scenes in Lincoln's life as specially memorable. He pictured him at twenty, seeing the great world for the first time, in charge of a little cargo boat on the Mississippi, and he pictured that unique triumphal entry

which shortly preceded his death, when the conqueror wandered, almost unattended, through the streets of what the day before had been the Confederate capital. And it is on just such scenes in Lincoln's history that memory will always dwell. Given his genius and his incomparably lofty character, his early laboring life and the rough, uncultured folk from whom he sprang, appeal to our imagination, and they do so justly, because he took with him to the end the strength which he was able to draw from what might have been sources of weakness, exhibiting when his powers were at their highest that quality, which it seems impossible and perhaps is needless to analyze, the grandeur of simplicity.

Naturally, however, the humble origin of Lincoln has from the first affected people in different ways, and startling instances might be given of men, who had especial reason for cherishing his true fame, but have thought his connection with very common people an uncomfortable fact to be as far as possible softened away. With an equally natural and far more estimable error of judgment, some of Lincoln's friends have been anxious to minimize whatever elements of coarseness or of eccentricity there may have been about him, or, in view of the great healthiness of his mind, the balance of temper and sanity of judgment to which he attained, to make nothing of the dejection and acute perturbations of mind through which, upon his own evidence, he passed.

On the other hand, there is a kind of sentimentality which attributes a quite unreal abasement to his early surroundings, and there is, of course, a taste which yearns to make the most of whatever in him might in any sense be called vulgar. His early familiarity with poverty, and the little traits of his which seemed incongruous with the

general dignity of his mind and bearing, form really two very distinct subjects, but both alike are difficult to treat with good taste and fidelity to life. Mr. William E. Barton, whose full discussion of Lincoln's religion (entitled *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*) shows in many ways an admirable sureness of touch, remarks of the former subject: 'It is difficult for Lincoln's biographers to strike a balance between adoring idealization of log-cabin life and horrified exaggeration of its squalor.'

I ought here, I think, to say a word of a book which has been unsparingly reprobated, but which falls not far short of that class of writings which, like *Boswell's Johnson*, make their subject alive and attractive to every reader in later days, by the determination with which they tell whatever facts might seem at first to belittle him. I am referring to the *Life of Lincoln* by Herndon and Weik, to which I fancy my kind correspondent, Mr. Jesse Weik, devoted a great amount of spade labor, while the general judgment and tone, as well as the personal reminiscences, are attributed to William E. Herndon, the last of Lincoln's several law partners at Springfield. (An earlier and still more vehemently reprehended *Life*, which an attempt was made to suppress completely, had been written by Lamon, a former Illinois lawyer who served under Lincoln in Washington as a high police officer. I confess ignorance of it, but understand that Lamon had no valuable materials except what had been communicated to him by Herndon.)

This is not the only helpful advice that I owed to the late Walter Hines Page and Mrs. Page when I was beginning to study Lincoln, but I would particularly like to say that Herndon's book was commended to me by that distinguished man — himself not un-

like Lincoln in a wisdom, fortitude, and utter kindness which was partly veiled and wholly endeared by exterior traits such as might have seemed ridiculous but that nobody could dream of laughing at him.

When Herndon was taken into partnership, as a much younger man, by Lincoln, he must certainly have combined considerable high enthusiasms of humanity with the promise of considerable power. He had broken with some courage from the traditions of his family to proclaim himself an Abolitionist; and, while he continued ardently in favor of an extreme policy against slavery, which Lincoln's judgment (now seen to have been wiser) refused, it is greatly to his credit that, without understanding Lincoln's attitude, he respected it absolutely, and devoted some acuteness and resourcefulness to advancing his career. He was, besides, a keen, though probably not very sound student of varied literature (poetry, philosophy, and so forth), such as came his way, and would have classed himself as, on most subjects of thought, from theology downward, one of the enlightened. Lincoln would borrow his books, reject some after one glance, and tear out the heart of others; and of literary and intellectual talk in that office, as Mr. Rankine, once a clerk in it, describes it, there was certainly no lack.

How much in one way and another Lincoln owed to Herndon it would be idle now to inquire; quite possibly it was as much as Herndon would have had us believe. But he does not bring to our notice just what he himself owed to Lincoln, who had hard work to keep on the rails an amiable but rackets young man, and whose contrivance and none too abundant cash were apt to be drawn upon to get him out of serious scrapes. For (not to mention that Mrs. Lincoln hated Hern-

don, and he her) Herndon was what men of the graver New England race in Illinois would probably have called 'a Southern sport'; his convivial habits ultimately reached those lengths which suggest to us why Western towns like Springfield 'went dry'; and by the time he put forth his great book he had added to them indulgence in opium. It is quite kind, as I conceive, to say this, for the book is more likely to be duly appreciated when this light has been thrown on the unsteady judgment of its very active-minded author, and besides a baser charge has been freely urged against Herndon. It is the fact, I believe, that Herndon expected and even applied for some great office, such as an Ambassadorship, at Lincoln's hands; and of course Lincoln, with the knowledge which he had, could not possibly offer him any post that was adequate to his self-esteem. So his book has sometimes been dismissed with contempt as that of a 'disappointed office-seeker,' destitute of veracity and animated by sheer spite.

There is no shadow of reason, so far as I can learn, for impugning his veracity or even his general correctness in matters of fact. As to the main motive with which he wrote, no intelligent reader can mistake it. With flashes of insight alike into Lincoln's strength and his weaknesses, he nevertheless admired Lincoln to the verge of idolatry; believed in his growing genius as few other men ever did. But he believed, and believed quite rightly, that the most unvarnished presentment of any and every incident of his life or trait of his character was the greatest service that could be done to his just fame. There is no doubt sufficient foundation for the view of Herndon as primarily a disappointed office-seeker to make it unfair as well as untrue. He accounted for the scant recognition which Lincoln as president could bestow on him, by

the theory that he was somewhat lacking in warmth of personal affection and this made him in effect neglectful, which he was not, of his old Illinois friends. This was very natural, and to be aware of Herndon's bias is to get rid of the one thing seriously derogatory to Lincoln which can be found in the book, namely, the impression which it conveys of a certain streak of cold-heartedness in his benevolence. And in a curious manner, to which I shall return, he was led and has led others to overlook the width and vigor of Lincoln's intellectual range. But he accomplished the service which, in spite of the pique and the plentiful self-conceit that repeatedly got the better of him, he had with loyalty in the main undertaken to his friend's memory.

There is a pretentious and ridiculous saying that no man is a hero to his valet. A man must be singularly unfortunate in experience of domestic servants not to know that, taken literally, the saying is absolutely untrue; but it is of course the expression of an evil spirit which has persistently suggested how poorly we should think of the best and greatest if only we could see behind the scenes, and watch their unguarded hours. Now it happens that one or two historic figures have found biographers who could enable us to see them thus, and they are just the figures which have won the fullest affection and regard. Johnson and the great Boswell furnish the classic and sufficient example. Herndon was not great like Boswell; he had neither the single-mindedness of Boswell's affection, nor the delicate sureness of his moral judgment; but he was a warm-hearted and keen-witted man. Accordingly, though he composed no very complete literary portrait of his hero, he gave the seemingly inconsistent fragments which a sympathetic reader can piece



into some sort of living semblance of the real man; he could not well interpret the mystery, but he could make the reader aware of its presence. And, on the coldest estimate of what we owe to him, this at least must be confessed: whatever were the flaws or weaknesses in Lincoln's private character, whatever there may have been that detracted from its dignity and its purity, we may be pretty sure that we know the worst of it. The worst, in itself, comes to ludicrously little; and the man is a greater and better man to us for our knowledge of it. The observation which has often been made, that Herndon's book would have been a

valuable one if only he had had the discretion to omit some slightly displeasing details, is one against which I cannot refrain from entering a most earnest protest. Before saying what little more I have to say, on the twofold subject with which I began this article, I have thought it right to make this rough attempt at justice to one who in the main was a true friend to Lincoln during his life and to his memory afterward. Of Lincoln's true friendship to such a man as I have described, few details are to be known, but the broad fact of it, when once noticed, is enough to throw a new and a pleasant light on Lincoln's own character.

[*The New Statesman*]

## THE TRUE STORY OF A STATUE

BY 'AFFABLE HAWK'

THE Duke of York's Steps is the finest site in London for a statue. It struck me particularly the other day, for I had heard a rumor that a proposal was on foot to remove that royal personage from his exalted position and replace him by the effigy of a worthier man. Few people know how he came to be perched there. The best account of his character and career is to be found in that delightful book of historical gossip, *Glimpses of the Twenties*, by Mr. William Toynbee.\* Mr. William Toynbee is one of the few English writers who handle historical subjects of the personal kind with the wit and neatness of French memoir writers. He writes from a full mind and he knows the beginning of the nineteenth

century as well (and he is at home in it) as Mr. Austin Dobson knows parts of the eighteenth century. I cannot think why his two books, the one I have just mentioned and *Vignettes of the Regency*, are not better known; they are delightful reading.

The Duke of York was George III's favorite son. He came next in age to the Regent, and he was called the Hope of the Family, not on account of his brains—of these he had a scanty share—but because, one of a bad bunch of brothers, he was the most amiable, courageous, and genial. His life was spent in raking, drinking, gambling, and sinking ever more deeply into debt, but 'Tommy Atkins' liked him. There was a kind of boisterous bonhomie about him for which the English have

\* Constable, 12s. 6d. net.